

This interview was conducted with Adrian Laborde on January 12, 1974, by Jack Bass. Transcribed by Jean Pruner.

J.B.: What do you think is the legacy of the Longs in Louisiana politics?

Laborde: There is no enduring legacy in my judgment. I, along with everybody else who follows the political scene in Louisiana, used to think that there was, and there was until 20, 25 years ago. There is no enduring legacy. At that time, there was a general feeling that the Longs had left, had put populism on the political map of this state, that forever there was going to be bi-factionalism in Louisiana with the Longite regime, or whatever follows . . . followed Longism, would be the liberal element within the Democratic party in Louisiana. Liberal in terms of friends of the little man and welfare programs, that sort of thing. This is what made Longism, you know. But you go back to 1950 or thereabouts, and subsequent years and that legacy isn't there. I mean, there is no longer a tangible Long faction in Louisiana politics. And Huey Long's legacy, whether you call it populism or whatever, did not endure much beyond Long and his immediate colleagues. Well, even his immediate family, you can erase that, because, take his son Russell, who is now the senior Senator, as you know, from Louisiana. I think Russell is a smarter politician than Huey. In 1952, I think it was, one of Long's powers in Congress, the late Hale Boggs, decided to run for governor against at least one candidate very easily identifiable with the old Long faction. Russell publicly supported Hale Boggs. So, if you're talking about a political legacy, there has been none except for a very short period, from maybe . . .

J.B.: Let's see, who got elected that year?

Laborde: 1952, that was, I think Earl. Let me count back. We've had so many two-term governors but none consecutive. I think '52 was Earl Long. Let's see, '56 Jimmie Davis, no '60 Davis, '54, '52, that must have been Robert Kinnon, Judge Kinnon. That's who it was. Then Earl came back and was re-elected in '56.

J.B. : So, what was it, it was Kinnon, Boggs and Carlos Spate?

Laborde: Carlos Spate was the Long . . .

J.B.: He was the Long candidate.

Laborde: Yeah. Judge Spate. Now, there is, if you get away from the strictly political legacy, I think there will be at least one other generation that will equate such basic things, basic today, they were revolutionary in Huey's day, as free textbooks for the school kids in Louisiana, which is commonplace all over now. But Huey Long gave that to Louisiana. He gave the state a fairly good network of highways at a time when there were no good highways in the state. He started the charity hospital system, good, bad, or worse, but he started it. And you'd be surprised at the younger generation who never knew Huey, were not here or were not adults, at least, at the time. This has been handed down from the followers of Huey and his supporters, so that you might call that a Long legacy. And to that extent, I think perhaps today for somebody who was easily identifiable with the old Long machine, and I call it a machine, it wasn't, were to come along and run for office and try to revive that bi-factionalism as we knew it then, I think it might be amazing at how many younger generation voters would line up with that faction. It's . . . there's still some of it. But the political powers, and I mentioned the case of Russell backing Hale Boggs, that same election Representative . . . Congressman Jimmy Morrison for

the 6th District of Louisiana, who had been made politically by Huey and his people, also supported Hale. So the political pros backed away a long time ago, but there's still an element of rank and file voters that haven't given up. But I think Longism as a faction of Louisiana politics, other than that, is dead. So, to answer your question, there is no enduring legacy.

J.B.: Except in, to some extent, terms of programs.

Laborde: Well, yes, but I mean this is not . . . you might consider it a legacy if you weigh it against what was here when Huey Long came on the scene and what is here now. But then, if you look elsewhere, and see that similar programs, social programs, have come to pass elsewhere where certainly Huey was not a factor, never was, never even known perhaps, It might be a matter of timing rather than of personality, so do you credit Huey Long and his type of politics and government, or do you credit the coming along at the right time at the right place? In other words, you could argue all day, that no matter who had taken over the reins of government in Louisiana at the time, the same things might have come to pass. Of course, this is indeterminate but, even so, because it has happened at that time or shortly afterwards in other states, you really, to be objective, it's hard to credit Huey, as most people have credited him with all those things.

J.B.: In the last governor's race, did that election represent the shifting of power from the north to the south?

Laborde: Yes and no. What it actually did, it just put the power where it really lay in Louisiana. Your population, your voting strength is from Red River south, from Alexandria south. And this is the first time that it has voted in some semblance of unity. The strength of

south Louisiana coalesced when it has never done that before. All these north Louisiana governors we have been electing, including big John McKeithan for two terms, and before that as far back as you can go until the turn of the century, unless you go Sam Jones of DeRidder, a south Louisianian. They were elected by the people of south Louisiana. This is the first time that the people of south Louisiana decided, apparently, let's vote for one of our own for governor.

J.B.: Well, is Alexandria considered part of the south?

Laborde: No, Alexandria is considered part of the north. It's really on the boundary. By any gauge, you're sitting right here as if you are on the boundary of two foreign countries, but even between Egypt and Israel, there's that much difference. But Alexandria is considered more north Louisiana than south . . . although its people, it's polyglot and it's got a pretty good mixture of south Louisiana and north Louisiana by, I mean, you've got a lot of French cajun influence here. You've got, probably, a larger percentage of Roman Catholics among your religious here than you have in any other north Louisiana city. So it's a mixture. But still Rapides Parish, Alexandria is the seat, county seat, parish seat, always votes the way the rest of north Louisiana votes.

J.B.: How do you characterize these two, you referred to them, different nations?

Laborde: Well . . .

J.B.: North and south.

Laborde: Well, I don't know by what barometer, what yardstick you want to use but north Louisiana is waspish, always has been. South Louisiana is pretty heavily Latin flavored, as you know, especially southwest Louisiana. A lot of French people, a lot of Catholic people, a lot of

liberals, and I don't mean by the conventional term liberal or conservative, but I mean people who like the good life, not as straitlaced as the people of north Louisiana. A lot of people, especially in north Louisiana, and some very intelligent people whose judgment is unquestioned, like to say that north Louisiana is conservative by the old political definition and south Louisiana is liberal. I can see no justification for that. The point to make there I think and very few would admit it, is that north Louisiana is more conservative on the old race issue. There's a lot more racism. There has been, let's put it that way. From here on north than here on south, at least it has been more overt. And this is the only way you can judge it. And this is probably one reason, incidentally, in my own judgment, what I have seen, that south Louisiana has always given a pretty substantial vote to some of these north Louisiana candidates because invariably, in recent times, they have made race an issue. McKeithan beat Chep Morrison, who was a very popular mayor of New Orleans, as you know, Ambassador to the O.A.S. and all that. And McKeithan beat him in 1964 on the race issue. See, Morrison had led several candidates, I forget, but I think six in the first Democratic primary. He almost got a majority of the vote in the first primary, but not quite. So he was in the runoff with McKeithan and McKeithan had a lot of money available, got on television, radio and newspapers, and he made race the issue. The black vote had gone substantially to Morrison. His battlecry, McKeithan's, was "Hep me." H-e-p. And this became . . . they called him "Hep me" McKeithan for a long time. Because of the black vote. "The black vote is against me. You got to hep me." And he got all of the racists and some of the middle-of-the-road voters in south Louisiana on the race issue. He got them all in his corner so

he clobbered Chep Morrison in the runoff. To the surprise of a lot of people south of here, not to my surprise, because a week before the election Chep sat in an old rocking chair in that den there. He had come back from a trip in north Louisiana. He slapped me on the leg, said, "A us, we're going to finally win one." I looked at him like that, I says, "Chep, I don't want to be the killjoy, but you're not going to win." There were three of his friends with him there and he almost fell off his rocker. He said, "You're crazy." I said, "Hell, I've been here long enough. This is an observation post here, you know. Watchdog." I says, "Unless you can carry New Orleans by a very substantial margin and all of southwest Louisiana, you're going to be defeated because, " I said, "from here on north it's going to be the same old story." On election night, I was at the office and the first precinct to report in was the county seat of Lasalle Parish, north of here neighboring Winfield, Jena. There were 87 votes cast, as I recall it, thereabouts, and it was 85 for McKeithan and 2 for Morrison. And I told the fellow sitting next to me, I said, "This is the first box but it might as well be the last." It's only a question now of what the final figure will be."

What I had predicted was happening. They just were not going to vote for a south Louisianan, especially a New Orleanian in this case, liberal Catholic, who had gotten the black vote in the first primary. Now, this black vote thing, as you know, this is something not only southwide but nationwide. In a lot of areas and certainly Louisiana, you can't be elected to state office without it. I don't see how you can. You'd have to get the white vote 100% and that's very difficult. If you curry the black vote, the minority vote, in a primary and you don't win in that primary, then the opposition makes an issue of it. And this is what happened with McKeithan. This is what happened when

Jimmie Davis defeated Chep Morrison before that. It was the race issue.

J.B.: Has that era passed or is that still a potent issue? Statewide elections.

Laborde: I don't think it's passed. I think it's a subsurface issue. We have made a tremendous amount of progress here, as elsewhere in the South. As a matter of fact, I like to think that Louisiana has probably made more progress than some of the other old deep South states, but it's still a smoldering subsurface issue. There is still thousands and thousands and thousands of people, middle age and older, who just won't end the Civil War. Let's face it.

J.B.: As time goes forward, let us say, does the younger . . . . As this middle and older generation today gets older and its influence becomes less, do you think the younger people coming into the electoral processes are as concerned about race?

Laborde: There is hope that they are not as concerned. Well, and it's not only because of the evanescence of one generation and the arrival of another one, because I think mass communications and advances in transportation, that sort of thing, advanced technology, has done more to erase the racial lines in this country than all this civil rights legislation in Congress. There's no question in my mind. So I say I'm hopeful that the young generation, some of them are still being taught, "Now this fellow is a nigger. Don't associate with him." There is still some of that. But by comparison with the era when I was coming up there is not much of it. But by the same token I remember what I used to hear when I was a kid in high school. In those days vote buying was rampant, you know, there were the old paper ballots. It was very easy to buy votes even of an intelligent voter. And my father, he's an old country

bumpkin but he's pretty shrewd and he always liked to dabble in politics. Never ran for office but he supported somebody openly and went around introducing him in the old country style fellow. And his candidate invariably would lose because he tried to run an honest campaign and my father wouldn't back a crook. One day he had lost a race for sheriff and he was really angry. He told me, he says, me and my brother, he says, "I'm going to give up. We can't elect an honest man but this will change when you boys grow up. The voters will all be educated. They will make independent judgments and they won't sell their votes and the whole thing will change." It hasn't come to pass. The electorate as a whole is considerably more enlightened, but you'd hardly know it from some of our elections. But I think this thing is happening with respect to race. I think our younger generation are more enlightened and enlightenment per se has brought about less bigotry, a broadening of the collective mind, and I think racism is on the way out. It's not gone, by a long shot. It's still, as I say, a smoldering subsurface fact in politics in the South.

J.B.: What do you think will be the long range political effects of school desegregation, the fact that younger voters coming into the electoral process will have gone to school with people of other races?

Laborde: Well . . .

J.B.: Black or white.

Laborde: There again I think overall there will be greater tolerance both among blacks and whites and therefore the racist angle in politics should almost disappear in the next 10 or 20 years. This is one positive, expectable positive result of integration. On the other hand, there are still countless thousands, the percentage is probably anybody's

guess, of young people whose parents, perhaps under other pretenses than just racism, have sent them to private schools rather than integrated public schools who have . . . or have told them, "Now you have to go to this school, this is where you were zoned, and it's the law of the land and we've got to mix the whites and the blacks in school, but you still white." There is still some of that. And, now, whether this parental advice, negative though it might be, can predominate over the long haul over the actual example and lessons in the schoolroom where these kids are together, only time can tell. But I think overall it's got to be a positive factor. We have got to eliminate or at least cause some moderation in the issue of racism in politics in the South. You find it that way in other states? Where are you from originally?

(Interruption on tape.)

. . . say Louisiana is like two different countries, not two states. We have this north Louisiana, south, which you don't have. But from what little bit I've learned about South Carolina politics, there is a lot of similarity. I think you have these political accidents and opportunists and demagogues like Strom Thurmond. You're liable to have them in any state. He might be a great white father to you but to me he's just a political opportunist and a damned demagogue. (Laughter.)

(Interruption on tape.)

. . . put him on the griddle pretty good but it looked like he had memorized all the answers and if they asked him a question whose answer he hadn't memorized, he was off the track and he couldn't answer. So afterwards, I chatted with him a little bit, started talking about what he thought of Russell Long and some of our old Louisiana and, hell, you couldn't make him make a firm statement to save your neck.

J.B.: And this was Strom?

Laborde: Strom Thurmond. All he was doing was saying what a great guy Nixon was. Maybe Nixon is a great guy.

J.B.: Do you see Gillis Long making any other attempts at statewide office?

Laborde: I wouldn't try to figure out what Gillis might do. He's a political animal. He says he's not interested in anything but staying in Congress a little while this time. He made the mistake once of trying to get promoted too quick because, you know, one term and then he runs for governor and got clobbered. Ran for governor again last time. Of course, he was unemployed as far as politics is concerned. Didn't have that much to lose but he got beat again. And I think Gillis has the makings of a real good Congressman. He's a smart fellow, you know. I don't know how much you know him, but he's one of the smarter Longs. Of course, they are all pretty shrewd. Gillis, like most of us, is bullheaded. You've got to twist his arm several times before he feels it but he's an awfully capable man. He ought to make us a real Congressman and I hope he stays there a while. A two-time loser for . . . you take governor, for example. He's lost twice and it's hard to come back even though he's still relatively young. And I don't know what else he'd run for. Certainly he's not . . . I don't know who or when he could beat for U.S. Senator. So, as I say, I think he ought to stay where he is if he can. He would make us a good one. We need people like Gillis Long. Some of his political enemies think he's great white liberal or the Humphrey type or something like that. I don't see that. I think he's pretty moderate and he waver a little bit and I think he ought to do that in public life. This business of trying to categorize somebody "way left of political center," "way right," that I think is ridiculous because I think the fellow who is way left, there are

occasions when he'll come to center and maybe he'll go to right of center. Isn't that right? And the same thing for the fellow on the other side of the fulcrum. He'll move a little bit and he should on issues. I don't think Gillis is no great . . . I'd say he is a moderate. He is conservative on some things as a matter of fact. But we need people like him, not only for Louisiana, but for the whole country, to offset some of our radicals on both sides. And we've got them in Louisiana, too. I don't know if you're familiar with our delegation, but we got this fellow Rarick from 6th District, Baton Rouge. That guy is not only a conservative, he's an ultra-radical, almost revolutionary. And that old, well that old Bassman, he's an ultra-conservative on some things and just plain nothing on others. And he's a capable congressman, but I think is a great in-between guy.

J.B.: Well, this changing racial attitude and so forth in Louisiana. What does that mean for congressmen like Rarick?

Laborde: Well, unfortunately, or fortunately, depending on how you view it, Rarick represents a district where he can polarize the conservative vote, or has been able to in the past, against the black and a few white liberals that, hell, it's no contest. Except for the city of Baton Rouge, his district is fairly waspish, you know. And this is what for. I thought last time that this fellow who is district attorney in Baton Rouge, I don't know the man personally, but he's got a pretty good reputation, been in public eye down there, O.C. Brown. I thought he would give Rarick a fit but he didn't do it. So maybe Rarick is just reflecting the collective philosophy of his constituents, I don't know. On the other hand, the old 8th District that Gillis represents, of course, has been changed so much, it goes way south and he's got a lot of the south Louisiana element, but the old

8th Congressional District was about the same as Rarick's. I mean it was waspish and you had to be all out right and you had to cuss all the liberal Democrats every opportunity and cuss the Negroes and everything else, if you got elected. So I don't think . . . Gillis might not be in Congress today if they hadn't reapportioned to give him some of this liberal south Louisiana territory. He got a considerable amount of it.

J.B.: Would it be fair to say that south Louisiana tends to be more tolerant, not only on race but on other things?

Laborde: Oh, sure.

J.B.: General approach toward life.

Laborde: Oh, sure. South Louisiana is where you have all your paramutuel betting at the racetracks. You have open bingo games and saloons all over the place and, you name it, it's a different country altogether.

J.B.: Would that explain . . .

Laborde: They're tolerant of everything.

J.B.: Would that extend to political corruption?

Laborde: It could very well. And I've seen this and heard it, that south Louisiana is more tolerant of corruption. They look the other way a little more. But I don't know that this is true. You'd have to weigh this against a lot of factors. You'd have to consider the relative population, for example, because, as I say, the population has moved south. North Louisiana except for two or three cities is now cutover timber land and it's losing . . . a lot of our parishes north of here are losing population every year. So, as a percentage of your population, I don't think there is any more tolerance of corruption in south Louisiana. As a matter of fact, most of the hell-raising about what erupts this corruption in public life has come from south Louisiana. There's not

too many of these Bible belt people in the legislature or elsewhere that make a big to-do about when something is exposed. I think a lot of it comes from south Louisiana.

J.B.: Well, do you think Louisiana politics tend to be more corrupt than the rest of the South or is it only exposed more?

Laborde: I have been accused of saying in print for years that this is true, that Louisiana has more than its share. It's difficult to say. I don't think it's exposed more. It has been the last, oh, say, well since McKeithan's second term, '68, and the last five or six years there has been extra effort everywhere, all fronts in Louisiana, from the federal courts on down to expose more of it and stop it. And it's very improved. Before that, I don't know. Maybe it's because we emphasize it too much. We emphasize the negatives too much in Louisiana, but I think we get more notoriety from our corruption in public office than most states. One of the most prominent bankers around here chastized me in a letter some time ago. He had . . . he sent me a clipping from The Wall Street Journal about some miscreancy, I think at that time in Pennsylvania in state government. And this Journal article mentioned some recent things in New Jersey. Of course, New Jersey is notorious, too, for bad politics. And several other states, and this banker, he said, "Look here. Louisiana is not even mentioned in these corrupt states. Why don't you lay off?" Well, I can't buy that. We've had a lot of corruption, maybe not more than the other states.

J.B.: Governor McKeithan said that there was a lot of charges of vote buying, vote stealing, and this resulted in the move toward voting machines. Said they put in voting machines. Earl Long had an election

and won handily. Won by the same . . . won by as big a margin as anybody would have guessed him to win anyway, and that the old . . . the charges themselves really were based on myth.

Laborde: I don't buy that. Of course, vote buying has always occurred and it's hard to prove, hard to catch anybody buying or selling a vote, you know. You'd have to have some . . .

J.B.: Well, I don't think he was talking so much about buying as stealing.

Laborde: Well, stealing, the same thing. I . . . you've got to conclude that it's easier to steal x-number of votes or steal an election with the old paper ballots. Because all you needed really . . . and I was just a kid and not voting in the early days of Longism. I did vote when Huey ran for office several times. I'm getting pretty old. When they could . . . oh, the books are full of that stuff. Hell, they could keep out so many ballot boxes until they determined what they needed to win. Or they could lose some. Some of them I'm told in, where is it, Jefferson Parish, that have never been found, ballot boxes. And now this cannot happen with voting machines. I don't think they've ever lost forever any tally sheets off the voting machines. If they have, I've never heard of it. It's easier to steal an election or corrupt an election with paper ballots. And I'm sure this, as I recall, a lot of pressure for voting machines was because of that. Of course, there is a lot of other advantages to voting machines, and I don't think anybody who has ever had them would want to go back. Is there any state not using voting machines nowadays? Do you know?

(Interruption on tape.)

. . . was an unpaid assistant to McKeithan for several years. He was his

campaign manager.

J.B.: Oh, that was the voting machine . . .

Laborde: Yeah.

J.B.: . . . commission payoff.

Laborde: Yes. He got a half a million dollars in commissions from the people who sold voting machines to the state. And he was indicted in the federal grand jury. The state juries didn't bother him. And twice the thing ended in mistrials. His argument, his defense, and McKeithan has stood by him, was that when he collected these fees, this commission, he was not a paid state employee. He was just a lobbyist or a salesman or whatever. And it's sort of comical. And I'm not trying to gig John McKeithan. He and I have been personal friends. I've criticized him in print.

J.B.: No, I . . .

Laborde: We're still personal friends.

J.B.: No, I want you to help us put him in proper perspective.

Laborde: As a matter of fact, six months before John McKeithan left office, when he was still having a lot of trouble, he followed me all the way to Baton Rouge at my in-law, at my daughter-in-law, to beg me to go and help him run his office for the last six months of his term. I thought he was kidding, you know. He said, "No." He said, "I need you down there." Several times he's tried to get me to take a leave of absence from the paper and go do something for him, run some kind of department. And we've always been the best of friends. And maybe this is one reason, because he knows I'm not going to throw out any bullshit about him. I'm pretty candid about everybody. And if I think he did something wrong, I'm just liable to say it in print. And if he does something right, I'll praise him. But he's got a habit of spouting

off, you know, without too much . . . and I've told him that to his face. He ought to listen more and talk less. It's got him into a lot of trouble. He almost resigned the governorship, you know, early in his second term because he had gone to the Democratic . . . famous convention in Chicago where he was . . . he really thought he was going to be a candidate for Vice President and he would be nominated for Vice President, Democratic ticket. And then . . . I don't think anybody had that in mind except John McKeithan. Anyway he left before the convention was over and he came back a changed man I thought. The change might have started before that. But he actually threatened to resign and he wanted to resign and his Executive Secretary called me and my publisher, Joe Smith, who he knew were about as close to McKeithan as anybody else in the media, to go down there and have breakfast with him and try to talk sense into him, and we spent half a day there and told him that the worse thing that could happen to him and the state of Louisiana was for him to resign. We talked him out of it.

J.B.: Why was he talking of resigning?

Laborde: Because he said, "I've had it up to here. I can't do anything with the legislature. The press is on me. The people don't believe in me no more. I'm going to turn it over to Taddy Aycock," who was then the Lieutenant Governor. And he was serious.

J.B.: Who was his executive assistant at that time?

Laborde: At that time was Ed Stagg, who was on loan from the Council for a Better Louisiana, a private, non-political organization. But McKeithan had run out of Executive Secretaries and he borrowed Ed from CABL, C-A-B-L. (Interruption on tape.)

J.B.: He was really feeling down, then, after that?

Laborde: Was he down.

J.B.: Was it directly a result from the convention or just a reaction . . .

Laborde: Well, this is when I detected it. Now, it might have started before that. He was having a bad press before that. And like I told him at this long breakfast meeting in the mansion (I've never sipped so much cold coffee) a lot of it was his fault. He overreacted to certain things. You know, you got a state under our system, you're going to be criticized, I don't give a damn how good you are. And you've got to learn to take it. He overreacted. He thought everybody was out to get him. Pretty much the condition the President was in, perhaps still is, with the media in the East with the television networks. McKeithan was convinced that the press in Louisiana was out to get him. But I didn't detect any real problems until after Chicago when I found out he wanted to resign. And I thought it was a joke until I went down there and it wasn't a damned joke. He was just as serious as he could be.

J.B.: What were the things that had gotten him into trouble, besides the Vice Presidential thing?

Laborde: Well, really nothing of major consequence, just a lot of smaller things. There were . . . there had already been these allegations, you know, about Sammy Downs , and, of course, there was the famous Life magazine article about the Mafia running the capitol. I'm sure you've heard of that.

J.B.: Right. How do you evaluate that article?

Laborde: Well, at that time, I thought there was perhaps a lot of substance to it. I never believed the Mafia had too much influence on state government, but a lot of the other things in there I thought were substantially based, until I got to know this chap a little better who wrote the thing. And he

gets pretty wild sometimes. He sticks basically to facts, but, you know, you know the old story about stating facts two ways. You can say this guy spoke to an auditorium that was half full or half empty, you know, two different connotations. But, aside from the Mafia, I think maybe it had a lot of facts about what was going on. Well, we developed that in this so-called Mafia investigation that the legislature conducted. They found out all sorts of monkey business in such places as the Department of Revenue. My gosh, the state was looking the other way and collecting taxes from about three-fourths of the taxpayers and letting the others go scot-free. Some pretty big ones, too. It was a hit and miss thing. It was unbelievable.

J.B.: Well, was McKeithan directly involved with any of this?

Laborde: No, but these were McKeithan's appointees that were running all these departments. I don't think McKeithan was involved in this thing but I do think McKeithan, and I've told him that to his face, knew more than he acknowledged in the things, for example, involving Sammy Downs. Now, Sammy Downs was the man in charge of the so-called "black box," this little secret telephone in the governor's office that was in a black box and nobody could use it but one, and that was Sammy Downs using that phone. Now, whether it was connected to Mafia headquarters in New Orleans, Carlos Marcello, or it was not, I don't know. I'd never try to guess. But McKeithan never said much about that little black box. And I think there were things going on that he knew about that he said he didn't know about. But it might have been hindsight now we can say that. He might have been in a position with Nixon and people like Halderman or Erlichman and whatnot.

J.B.: McKeithan to us just sort of dismissed the Marcello thing saying

that there was one guy on his staff who he picked up who was an alcoholic who used to talk to Marcello, but that he really never met the man and that Marcello testified that the only time he had ever met McKeithan was once they shook hands when he was greeting a group of people.

Laborde: That could be true. I don't think McKeithan . . . he's not that kind of man . . . would not knowingly have any truck with Marcello or any of those people. He's not that kind of man. I, of course, I used to think that about Jimmie Davis, but you know after Jimmie Davis left office, there were allegations that the Mafia had financed him substantially in his last campaign. So you never can tell. It's not any wonder to me, who have been studying that stuff and writing about it and trying to evaluate and appraise it and make sense out of it for all of these years, that now, finally, we see the evidence that public confidence and trust in politics and government is at rock bottom. It doesn't surprise me a bit.

J.B.: Who has headed up the Mafia investigation?

Laborde: I'd have to check to check our files on that.

J.B.: Was the guy who wrote that original story?

Laborde: That was David Chandler wrote that.

J.B.: Does the fact that he later ran for governor, did that . . .

Laborde: Oh, that was a joke. Hell, I don't think he . . .

J.B. : Did that make his story less credible?

Laborde: I don't think so. If he had really waged a campaign and gotten a substantial number of votes, there might have been some intertwining there. The poor fellow didn't get any votes hardly. I don't think he made one campaign speech or bought one campaign ad or anything. He just got his name on the ballot really. It was a damned joke. Some people accused him publicly of having written that article way back yonder with

the idea it would help him politically in some political campaign. That's why he . . . in other words, he was building up a campaign for governor, but fizzle number one, if that was the case. This Life magazine thing might have been unfair to the state. McKeithan made a big to-do but the fact remains . . . I'm sure you've heard this. He might have told you about it. He and some of his top aides flew to New York in a huff. They were going to tell the editors of Life magazine where to get off, you know. Sue them. As a matter of fact, they did sue them for \$10,000,000, never got a dime. And he came back from New York and said he was not going to do anything to Life magazine because they knew things on us we didn't know and they didn't print all they knew, or something like that. (Laughter.) That's where the thing ended. It's a great game.

J.B.: How do you assess McKeithan's administration insofar as corruption is concerned, and him personally?

Laborde: I do n't think John was involved in any corruption personally of any magnitude. His first four years, his first term, and this . . . what hurts his image record in Louisiana is that damned second term. His first term everybody thought he was doing a great job. He was a good salesman, you know, he's a good front man. Number one salesman. As a matter of fact, when he wanted to resign, my publisher, Joe Smith, told him that. He said, "John, you're probably the best salesman in this state but you're probably the worst administrator in this state," or something to that effect. But he put on a good front. He would go to New York and talk to these industrialists, got a lot of big payrolls in Louisiana, and did a lot of good things. Didn't get involved in any shenanigans until towards the end there. But, as it turned out, John had surrounded himself with some pretty capable people. They weren't all Sammy Downses. And they were doing a good

job. But then the chickens began to come home to roost after the Life magazine expose and it's investigation. And it turned out that some of the underlings weren't what they were cracked up to be and they started hitting McKeithan where it hurt. And he didn't have, as Joe said, he wasn't strong enough administrator to straighten it out right away, keep it out of public view. And all hell broke loose. But I don't think John was a corrupt man. I still don't think . . . I think he is basically an honest man, as honest as an 8-year governor can be. The temptations are terrific, you know. I'm sure you've heard some of these stories and I don't repeat it or publicize it, but when he made his trip to Europe, supposed to be in quest of industry, towards the end of his term, and one of the standard jokes around the Capitol was that he left the party for two or three days. He took a side trip to Switzerland to deposit all that money in the Swiss banks. And he laughs at that sort of joke. I don't think he stole any money. I don't think he tried to. I think he's basically honest. I think most of our governors in Louisiana have been honest as far as personal gain. They all come out in pretty good shape. They do in every state. You never know an ex-governor to go on welfare or anything like that or really have to work. They make connections, but I don't think any of our governors, including Huey, Huey didn't enrich himself directly. He set the stage to enrich himself but the poor fellow didn't live to enjoy it. Some of his cronies got it. Jimmie Davis probably did better than anybody else, but then his friends will tell you he did it as a hillbilly recording artist, not as governor. Judge Kinnon probably left office as poor as he went in. He was a country judge and he's still trying to practice law. I don't think he's a wealthy man. Sam Jones was a fairly wealthy lawyer whom I admired and still do. I don't think he left office with more than he . . .

So even some of our governors that gave this state a fairly bad image, I think were basically honest.

J.B.: How do you evaluate Earl Long?

Laborde: I think Earl was about the most honest of the Longs as far as personal gain was concerned. Earl didn't take a dime that didn't belong to him. I'm convinced of that. He and I didn't get along worth a damn. But I'm convinced of that. He was a boor and everything else, but as far as dishonest, no. Earl, if he did do something . . . get something under the table, it was to help somebody else, not to help Earl Long. That was one of his weaknesses. No, I think he was probably the most honest of the Longs.

J.B.: How do you evaluate the Edwards administration?

Laborde: I think Edwards is doing a terrific job. Of course, I can't be very . . . I can't be unbiased, perhaps, because I was with him all the way, a personal friend of years standing. But I think he's doing a terrific job and I wasn't surprised when he came out this week with a poll that showed that 84% of the people in Louisiana think he's doing a good job. That's pretty damned high. Almost half-way point. He has made mistakes like everybody else. He's got some duds in his official family. And I guess he'll get rid of some more. He's gotten rid of some one or two already. It's a hell of a job to be governor of this state, you know. You got to accept the responsibility for what so many others do. And you appoint people to responsible positions assuming that they will remember who gave them the job and try to keep him out of it, but that's not easy. That's not always possible. But I think for a man with the problems that Edwin has had . . . my gosh, man, you look first of all, your freshman . . . his chair in the governor's office isn't warm yet, the senior Senator from

Louisiana dies 30 days before the primary. That's a hell of a headache for a governor. What to do? Call another election, let the other candidate be the nominee, appoint somebody for the interim term? You know what he did; he appointed his wife.

J.B.: How was that received by the public?

Laborde: Amazing, there was no flack at all. None at all. Of course, you know, I don't know if you know our governor, but he's quick with a neat phrase. He's got a good explanation, makes a joke of everything. Appointing his wife was the only way he wouldn't get half of the people of Louisiana mad at him. If he had appointed anybody else, he would have that clique very happy, but the one he did not appoint, his gang would be mad, angry, want to tear him to pieces. Couldn't win. He says, "My wife, no problem." On top of that he wanted . . . he said he wanted to be sure whoever he appointed for the interim term was someone who would not run for a full term. And he says, "I can't . . . somebody might tell me they won't run, but," he says, "I can't believe him. I can't trust him. My wife, I can. I'll see to it that she does not." So he got by. I was surprised. I expected the ceiling to cave in on him, really. Brand new governor appointing his wife to the U.S. Senate.

J.B.: The net effect of that was to insure Bennett Johnston of a victory, wasn't it?

Laborde: Well, no matter who he appointed, I think, the way the thing developed . . .

J.B.: Not the net effect of his appointment, but the net effect of the entire situation.

Laborde: Well, the effect of Allen Ellender's death was it.

J.B.: Right.

Laborde: Bennett Johnston who had the gall to oppose this old man and

nobody else would run against him while he was still alive, just happened to be the Democratic nominee by virtue of Ellender's death.

J.B.: And there was no Republican nominee, am I correct?

Laborde. No, I don't think there was. If there was, he must have pulled out. Yes, there was, too. I forget who it was. There was a name on the ballot. Yeah, there was. Because there was a three-way general election. McKeithan got in as an independent. This hurt McKeithan politically.

Because McKeithan and Johnston . . . who the hell was this Republican?

(Interruption on tape.)

J.B.: Just a token Republican, wasn't it?

Laborde: Yeah, and McKeithan did very poorly. Of course, he should have known that, hell. In Louisiana, running as a third-party or independent candidate in a general election against a Democratic nominee. Bennett Johnston really took ad- . . .

(Interruption on tape.)

J.B.: Did he do himself any permanent political damage in running for the Senate?

Laborde: Not in Louisiana. The I.Q. of the electorate in general is not that high that they don't pay that much attention to it.

J.B.: Does he have any political future?

Laborde: McKeithan? I rather doubt it. He's got further ambition. Sent me word the other day by one of my reporters, I don't know if he was serious or not, that if I backed him for governor, he'd run next time against Edwards. And that would be a terrible mistake, unless Edwards puts his foot in his mouth. I don't know. I am afraid John is finished, at the state level, anyway.

J.B.: Let me ask you this question about Edwards. I mean, after he appointed his wife . . . .

(Interruption on tape.)

Laborde: . . . accused him of flying to Las Vegas in a plane owned by this controversial Family Health Foundation, which is a state-federal financed outfit, but mostly federal funds in connection with the war on poverty and birth control advice or whatnot. They got a lot of equipment, a lot of money, and he went to Las Vegas on their airplane and this was exposed and he made some light vein comment, and so you didn't hear another word about it. People don't follow through on him like they did on McKeithan or his predecessors. He gets by with things like that.

J.B.: But that and his wife's rent and him just sort of dismissing it. But people tend to accept it, right? I mean . . .

Laborde: People forget about it. I'll bet you you sample the voters of Louisiana, north and south, all educational levels, all economic strata, and there's not one percent that will tell you they've ever heard of either.

J.B.: Well, this is one of the things that has struck us, is that Louisianans tend more to be more tolerant of, I wouldn't call it necessarily . . . these particular things, corruption, but in any other state, a governor who did something like that, there would be almost sort of public outrage.

Laborde: Well, some things result in a public outrage in Louisiana, but these are considered picayuneish details that are not worth a public outcry.

J.B.: So, where's the threshold of public outrage in . . .

Laborde: I'll tell you . . . the Public Affairs Research Council, which is a private, nonpartisan research and educational outfit (and thank God for them), their director is a newcomer to this state, Ed Steimel. And he made a speech or wrote an analysis or something some time back and he said the tolerance level for miscreancy in government in Louisiana is the

highest, or some such words, and he hit it right on the head. It's been a way of life in Louisiana. As a matter of fact, I have written fifteen or twenty years ago that if we ever did get a governor and an administrator in Baton Rouge that was absolutely on the up and up in every minute detail, never any question about propriety or ethics or anything else, the people would want him impeached. This is sort of a sport with the people of Louisiana.

J.B.: Well, yet you say you think most of the governors since World War II basically have been individually honest.

Laborde: Honest, yes.

J.B.: I mean, there seems to be a . . .

Laborde: Minor shenaniganism is not dishonest. No, there's a question in my own mind now, if there is an airplane that's owned by a public agency, jointly financed federal and state, it's legitimate, to have use of the airplane that's making a trip out West and the governor is offered a ride, why not? (Laughter.) I mean, to me I couldn't do it but most people that are brazen enough to run for governor, you know, they are in a class by themselves. They are all alike. I'll never forget, just before the election, I have a daughter who lives in Corpus Cristi . . .

J.B.: Now, who pays for these trips to Las Vegas, you know, presumably one goes to Las Vegas for just one . . .

Laborde: Actually, it's state and federal. This is . . .

J.B.: But how about . . . presumably one goes to Las Vegas for one reason, to gamble.

Laborde: Well, maybe he went to see a show or two. Not necessarily. No, as I see it, it takes a certain kind of person to run for public office, especially governor, or at that level. And what you and I might consider

questionable in public view is not questionable with them, it's perfectly all right. To give you an example, just before the election, as I was going to say, Edwin was here and I was telling I would have to take a long ride next day. Told him I was going to visit my daughter in Corpus Cristi, Texas. That's a nine-hour drive. Airplane connections are impossible. He says, "Let me fly you down there." I said, "Hell, no." He says, "I've got 32 airplanes at my disposal. Now this is 32 airplanes that people have put at my disposal to conduct my campaign." Says, "I'll fly you over there." I said, "No way. Suppose the people find out that . . . it's pretty well known that I'm supporting you for governor, and you flew me and my wife to Corpus Cristi on your campaign airplane." I said, "I couldn't live it down." He said, "Maybe you couldn't." "Aw," he said, "go on. You wouldn't worry about that." Hell, I would, but he wouldn't. And nobody else running for governor of any state would worry about little things like that.

(Interruption on tape.)

. . . government is so costly, not only in Louisiana, in every other state and in the national government. It's not . . . just never has been, never will be run like a private enterprise. It's the other fellow's money they are spending. You can take your most conscientious, most honest, most sincere, most economy-minded governor, U.S. Senator, Congressman, or President, and he will not husband the people's money like they would if it were their own money and their own . . .

(Interruption on tape.)

J.B.: To what do you attribute the relative weakness of the Republican party in Louisiana? Even as compared to other southern states, it . . . . You've got one member of congress, what, two or three legislators and that's about it.

Laborde: Yeah.

J.B.: And yet, it really . . . the people of the state I don't think are any basically different from other southern states where the Republican party is much stronger.

Laborde: No. Well, my own personal judgment, it might be far out in left field, is that people in Louisiana, although I have demeaned their average I.Q.'s, the voters, the masses, I think they ascribe less to political tags and labels even than other southern states. The name Republican, Democrat, doesn't mean a damned thing in most places. The fact that David Treen is a Republican congressman proves it. Now it's true, his hometown (it's a suburb of New Orleans, very populist) is rock rib, right wing, but the Republican registration is not high. But it is conservative. Across the Mississippi River west of there in his, the rest of his 3rd District -- typical south Louisiana, Latin, French influence, you know. Still Dave Treen defeated a pretty good Democratic candidate, fairly well known in that area. And the people who voted for Dave Treen are not Republicans. Now, north Louisiana, the Shreveport area, northwest Louisiana, represented by Joe Wagoner. If you could . . . if political philosophy meant anything vis-a-vis partisan labels, it would be more rock rib Republican, northwest Louisiana would, than even the staunchest Republican areas of Kansas and Iowa and that part of the country. Real conservative, by the old definition. But the people of Louisiana, and this probably good, they don't go by party labels. They'll cross right and left. This is traditional, of course, in presidential elections. They voted in modern times for Eisenhower, I think twice, and for Nixon, the voted Dixiecrat once. But even now in . . .

(Interruption on tape.)

J.B. : Why is it they don't register Rep . . .

Laborde: Register Republican? Because, basically this: we lose our opportunity to vote in too many primaries. The Republicans so seldom have a primary, for example, for police juror, which is equivalent to your county commissioner, member of the school board, mayor, town council, house of representatives, state senate, all of that. They go by default to the Democratic nominee. If you . . . under our primary election system in Louisiana, you have to be a registered Democrat to participate in these primaries in these elections. So if you register Republican, the Republicans don't have primaries, don't run any candidates for the offices, you go fishing on election day, except for the general election for governor, president and that sort of thing.

J.B.: So that . . . would that then tend to support the theory that lack of leadership in the Republican party insofar as building a party by recruiting candidates and getting them to register . . .

Laborde: All right, I've with some of the so-called leaders. A very good friend of ours is a national committeewoman. She is in her second four-year term, Mrs. Jean Boles. Very capable, very dedicated loyalist. I've proposed that question. She says, "You tell me." Says, "Before we can run candidates and have our own primary, we've got to get people to register Republican. But the people won't register Republican until we have primaries so they won't lost their franchise. Which comes first, the chicken or the egg? What do we do?" And I said, "That's a damned good question." You can't go to the rank and file voter and tell him, "Now, look, Buster, if you register Republican and enough other people we are going to have enough Republicans to run for every office and you will be able to vote in every primary." Then he tells you, "No, I'm not going to register until you show me that you are going to run candidates."

But if they don't have anybody to run, what are you going to do? It's a problem. And I don't know that you . . . . We have had some pretty strong Republican leaders. I remember old man Charlton Lyons, wealthy old man in Shreveport, who died just a few months ago. He was Mr. Republican for years. Incidentally, he came close to . . . he gave John McKeithan one hell of a battle as a Republican candidate in 1964. It was . . . I don't recall the exact percentages but he broke all records for Republicans running for governor, this old man Lyons. Anyway . . .

J.B.: Treen didn't come as close as that apparently.

Laborde: Not quite, no. Percentage-wise, not nearly as close. And Lyons was a very capable, dedicated man and he spent his time and his energy and a considerable amount of money, of which he had plenty, to build up the two-party system in Louisiana. Build a Republican party. He didn't get too dammed far and he was a good man, widely respected, Democrats and Republican. I used to kid him. I'd say, "Mr. Charlton, I'm about to go register Republican." And about once a month, he would write me a little card, "If you haven't done it yet, let me know. I'll drive to Alexandria and personally escort you down to the courthouse to change your registration." He didn't get any noticeable gain in Republican registration.

J.B.: Well, what effect do you think Watergate is going to have on the development of the Republican party?

Laborde: In the South? None whatsoever, I don't think. The people who lean in that direction, either philosophically or by actual registration and voting, I don't think it's going to worry them too much.

J.B.: How about on growth?

Laborde: I don't think it'll have any effect on it. It might, well, we

haven't had any growth, in Louisiana at least, so the question is moot. It could conceivably and should probably sort of hold it at greater stagnation because the people would hesitate to pitch in a party that's in trouble. I don't know that will have much of an effect, though. You have so few registered Republicans and none of them are going to quit their party on account of Watergate. And the letters I get as editor of a newspaper on Watergate, it looks to me like most Democrats sure about . . . see nothing wrong with Watergate. You'd think Nixon was being crucified. So, what the hell. They are certainly not going to hold off if they plan to become a Republican just on account of Watergate. I don't think Watergate is a partisan issue here. It might be in some states where two-party system is actually in effect, where it's practiced. I'm sure it would have an effect, but not in the South. J.B.: Why don't Republicans fill tickets locally? I mean, is it that they don't have enough people registered to even run?

Laborde: Well, they . . . all they could do is put x-number of names on the ballot. They don't have that kind . . . enough people of the right caliber to run. They've tried, my gosh. The last board election here. Alexandria, this district, elects eight members of the school board and they scratched the bottom of the barrel. They got eight Republican names and most of them pretty good, substantial people, including this national committeewoman's husband, who is a very highly respected physician here. They didn't elect one of them. Strange thing, now the same people who would not cross party lines on the local election, (and this is what probably, in answer to your question a moment ago, is hampering Republican growth in Louisiana, is these ticket switchers who think nothing of switching presidential election, and even occasionally in a gubernatorial or congressional election.) They won't do it in strictly

local affairs. Even city hall and mayor, something like that.

J.B.: You believe, then, that the typical voter in Louisiana in his mind makes a real distinction between the Democratic party for state and local races and the National Democratic Party?

Laborde: Absolutely. Hell, they . . . most of these people who vote Republican in Louisiana, and I'm sure across the South, they identify the National Democratic Party with like Hubert Humphrey and the Kennedys, the liberal element, mostly. But they don't do it on a state level. At the state level everybody, almost, is a Democrat. You've got all kinds. You've got the heels, and the bastards, and the saints, and everything else. Nationally, these people down here, most of them, the rank and file, I'm talking about, you talk Democratic party nationally they think of the liberal element only. It's hard to tell them that you've got some Democrats elsewhere like some of our Democratic congressmen here in Louisiana who are further to the right than Barry Goldwater. That doesn't cut any ice with them.

(Interruption on tape.)

J.B.: Is Council for a Better Louisiana basically the activist arm of P.A.R.?

Laborde: They don't like to say so, and P.A.R. doesn't want to say so. I don't think they really that close kin. The trouble is there is an interlocking membership, both of them, the mainstays in both organizations, as far as I can tell, are pretty much the same people. Some of the big people professionally and business people in the state. For example, my publisher was president of P.A.R., then he was president of C.A.B.L. One of my good friends across the river here, retired chairman of the board of a big utility, was the first president of P.A.R. and the second

chairman . . . second president of C.A.B.L. and it's been that way all the way through. And a lot of duplication in the boards of directors, but this could be strictly accidental because you have the same membership. I mean there is only a certain type of people and just so many who can, say, plank three, four, five hundred or a thousand dollars a year to support C.A.B.L. and to support P.A.R. and be active in them. But I . . . and they work in close harmony. I've seen times and issues when they weren't exactly together. But to say one is the activist arm of the other, I don't think.

J.B.: Well, that was more or less the way McKeithan characterized it.

Laborde: Well, McKeithan has never gotten along with P.A.R. and mostly because of the director, Ed Steimel.

J.B.: What's been the differences there?

Laborde: Well . . .

J.B.: One of personality or programs?

Laborde: Well, it could be a little personality. Steimel is sort of like me, to use an old cliché, he tells it like it is. And, see, he's like a journalist. He's not running for office, Steimel and P.A.R. His job is to dig up facts, research, and lay them on the table for the people, the legislature, anybody who wants them. And any time you do that as you . . . your job as a research assistant ought to know, you win no popularity contest with the political establishment. You're going to step on a lot of toes a lot of times. This is what Steimel has done. I agree with P.A.R. just accidentally 99% of the time. And I agree with C.A.B.L. about that much, because I think what they propose, what they refer . . . . P.A.R. is not supposed to be activist, just research and report, but, of course, they are accused of, at least Ed Steimel, of being activists and

of trying to influence the legislature and perhaps he does even more than C.A.B.L. But, I tell you, I don't know how we'd manage without both of these organizations for long, especially P.A.R., P-A-R. They do a terrific job. I don't know if you've ever seen any of their material, research reports.

(Interruption on tape.)

J.B.: Do you think P.A.R. is perhaps the most politically influential group in the state?

Laborde: No, it shouldn't be but it isn't.

J.B.: How about with opinion-makers?

Laborde: Well, I don't know. It's hard to say. I could say they are influential with me but, on the other hand, I usually will agree with what they come out with before they come out. We just channel our thinking the same line. But the reason I say it's a hard question to answer, I think the opinion-makers or thought leaders are members, so I don't know who influences what. But I think Steimel and the whole staff and the membership are doing terrific jobs. They are fairly objective. They get in trouble with the governors and the legislature and whatnot because they research a subject and say, "Here's what Louisiana is doing. Here's what it is costing. Here's what the other states are doing. Here's what it's doing for them." And you draw your own conclusions. Well, more often than not we look pretty bad, especially on education. Their analyses on education are really pitiful. And I jump . . . I use them for editorials every time and I get cussed out going and coming by people in education, school board, teachers and everything else. They don't want to face up the facts. This is why McKeithan didn't like Steimel, still doesn't. On the other

hand, Edwards, I saw in his speech that you said you listened to at the convention, he said something about don't expect to pass this thing if P.A.R. is against one of the articles on, I think it's property tax. You can't do it. And he might be right because P.A.R. will put out these analyses. They won't say vote against this thing but they will enumerate the pluses and the minuses and, hell, anybody can see the minuses outweigh the pluses, so it's no damned good. They'll do that with enough people who are interested in voting for or against this constitution and I think Edwards was right. McKeithan would have never done that. He would have just cussed Steimel going and coming instead. By all means, you ought to talk to Ed Steimel. He knows more about what's wrong with the present situation in Baton Rouge, what has been wrong in recent years, I think, than anybody else because this is his life. He is there all the time and this is his business.

J.B.: How do you characterize the role of Victor Bussie? In Louisiana politics.

Laborde: Enigmatic. That's the one word. I thought under McKeithan, again, that he must have known where all of the skeletons were because he was at one time, to my knowledge, on 32 state boards and commissions. Most of them non-pay, a lot of them honorary, but there wasn't anything going that Victor Bussie wasn't in there. Very influential. And apparently he hasn't lost too damn much under Edwin Edwards. So I don't know what he's got on politicians. I have never been able to figure out why the AFL-CIO, organized labor, was considered such a political force in Louisiana. I'm sure it is. There is a lot . . . there is no such thing as non-unionized labor anymore and this has become an industrialized state as compared to an agricultural state. The big population centers, Baton

Rouge, Lake Charles, New Orleans. They are all heavily industrialized, tremendous union growth. But, my gosh, the weight they give to Victor Bussie and his henchmen, I never could rationalize that. Even on issues not touching industrial areas or the labor movement or anything of that nature. Even something pertaining to the farm belt up here in north Louisiana. They got to have AFL-CIO, Victor Bussie's rubber stamp or his . . . at least his opinion on everything. I don't know. Now, Victor is a very articulate man. Knows what he is doing, very forceful. But we have had labor leaders of that caliber before who didn't wield such political muscle, at least . . .

(Interruption on tape.)

. . . wielding a lot, to listen to him.

(Interruption on tape.)

. . . a resurgence occasionally of the Dixiecrat states-right movement, which is not . . . years from now in the long haul it won't be mentioned, probably, in political histories. But in Louisiana the big change has been I think, as I said initially, the demise of Long bi-factionalism with Longism as one of the factions. But this occurred, in my opinion, before . . . longer ago than 25 years so it's not a trend in the last quarter century. I think . . .

J.B.: You think it occurred even before the death of Earl Long?

Laborde: Yeah. Yeah, because, see, Earl had his ups and downs. We had some anti-Longs winning office at the state level and all levels and we had a lot of faction crossing. As I told you, in the case when Hale Boggs ran for . . . of course, this is only 20 years or so ago, when he ran for governor against Spate, who was identified as the Long candidate and Russell Long was Boggs' man and so was Jimmy Morrison, who was a

congressman that the Longs had made out of nothing.

J.B.: Do you see the present state of Louisiana politics, then, basically one of bi-fact . . . I mean multi-factional politics?

Laborde: More multi-factional than bi-factional, really. Another interesting thing, we talked about Republicanism, you know, some of the most knowledgeable political observers in Louisiana back yonder, we used to talk about Longism, anti-Longism, we used to say that this eventually would lead in a real two-party system. The anti-Longs would be more or less your Republicans, your conservatives; your Longs would be the mainstay of the Democratic party. This has not happened.

J.B.: Do you think it might happen?

Laborde: No, because I think Longism crossed . . . cut across these ideological lines and so did anti-Longism. So I never thought it would happen and it hasn't.

J.B.: Let me get your opinion on one more thing. Senator . . . I mean Governor McKeithan told us that . . . he said the corruption issue and image of Louisiana is really a myth. Because he says that no other southern state has the combined use of voting machines, a strong civil service system and he said a basically strong state ethics code.

Laborde: Basically strong. Yeah, I guess that's right. We've got a good . . . one of the few codes of ethics for elected and appointed public officials but it leaves a lot to be desired in its implementation. It don't rap enough people hard enough on the knuckles. But it's a good thing and it's one of the prides and joys of McKeithan's first term and I think it was a good blow for clean government. He might be right that Louisiana corruption is a myth. Maybe, as you questioned while ago, we just expose ours on the front pages and in full public view and other

states don't. But certainly we've had our share of it.

(Interruption on tape.)

. . . traditionally in Louisiana. It goes back so far, even before the days of Long. I'll never forget, I was abashed. 1945, I was in the Air Force. I was assigned to a new base in Kansas. I had never been up to Kansas. So I pulled up to this filling station late one November night. It was snowing. And there is my Louisiana license on my car, and this old boy cleaned my windshield, my gasoline. Army people was new to them, boy, and they welcomed them with open arms. "Louisiana, huh, the land of Huey Long and all the other crooks!" Just like that. It's just this old country bumpkin up in Kansas, you know. And I said to myself, "Is it that bad?" And I think this is the image Louisiana has outside its borders. We have no monopoly, no corner on the corruption market.

(Interruption on tape.)

J.B.: Is that still true that you can campaign politically in south Louisiana on Sunday but not in the north?

Laborde: Well, it might be. I don't think anybody does it anymore because campaigning is done largely on television, advertising. There's none of this town to town . . . town to town stumping. You jump onto the bed of a pickup truck, you know, and ten people gather around . . .

(Interruption on tape.)

J.B.: So you genuinely believe that corruption is far less in Louisiana than it was? There is less now?

Laborde: I think it's of a less serious nature. I think the people of Louisiana and especially the press is very sensitive, very jumpy, and we might tend to exaggerate, to magnify everything, you know.